# The Workshop.

A Monthly Journal, devoted to Progress of the Useful Arts.

EDITED BY

I. SCHNORR AND OTHERS.

No. 13. NEW SERIES.


## THE NATURALISTIC ELEMENT IN ORNAMENTATION.

By JACOB FALKE.

If we except the productions of South-sea islanders and other savage tribes of similar stamp, we shall find that nature with her vegetable forms has at all times and in all styles of art been the great archetype of ornamental motives. As far back as the history of art can reach, have plants and flowers been used for the decoration of every kind of art-production, and after the lapse of four or five thousand years, till within a short time, this sort of ornamentation has been for many objects the only one recognised as in true taste.

There are however especially two distinct methods in which the types of organic nature have been accepted and applied by art. According to one, the artist has nothing in view but the beauty of his work, and to him the forms of plants are but means to this end, to this end accordingly he makes them subservient, alters and transforms them as his fancy dictates, and as seems most suitable for the decoration of his subject, and above all, disposes them in a certain regularity and order, for order is the very life of art. Thus the artist reigns paramount over nature and her forms. This method, the transformation of vegetable, or even of animal forms according to the view and fancy of the artist, we designate as *Conventionalism*.

The second method, to which we apply the term *Naturalism*, proceeds from an entirely opposite point of view. Its great object is not the ornamentation of the subject, but the truest possible imitation of organic nature and her forms, with all her pleasing phenomena as they exist without any regularity, through favorable or unfavorable position, wind, weather and rain, or any other cause whatever, the naturalist transfering his types, the imitations of his originals, to the object he has to ornament.

In this second method the artistical requirements plainly occupy only the second place. The decoration has no reference to the character of the work, to its form and design, all which ought to be considered as the very conditions of its ornamentation; the mere imitation of nature is the only ornament looked for, while it may actually be quite opposed to the character of the object it is to adorn.

Hence it follows that, when the forms and creations of nature are to be employed as the ornaments of a work of art, the first method, that of conventionalism, is the proper one in the province of ornamentation. The naturalist makes himself the slave of nature, and therefore becomes incapable of satisfying the requirements of art, while the conventionalist frees himself from the fetters of nature and subjects her forms to his own will; thus, by detaching them from close union with her and raising them to the creations of true Art, gaining the power of satisfying all those requirements placed before him by the color, form, disposition and distribution of the object he has to ornament.

This treatment of not copying, but conventionalising vegetable forms has been followed by nearly all styles of the past, and it is remarkable that it is most strongly marked in the very earliest times, at the beginning of the development of art-history, while it would have most naturally been expected that a servile imitation of nature would have been more in accordance with primitive artistic ideas than conventionalism, which seems to imply a certain degree of higher cultivation. On the other hand



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the advance of modern ornamentation has followed the path of naturalism. But although the several art epochs have, almost without exception, observed the same method, there is a great difference in the manner in which they have done so, and in the degree in which they have departed from, or adhered to the natural types. We observe in this respect, in the course of art-history, a continual vacillation in style, a continual change and development, which excites so much the more interest, as it is a characteristic mark not dependent on the caprice of the individual artist, but on some peculiarity of the people, the time, or the art-epoch. It is this change the peculiarities of which we purpose now to trace in its advance through art-history.

We have already mentioned the remarkable fact, that at the very earliest development of art-history, witness all known characteristic styles, we meet with a highly marked conventionalism in ornament. It is so in the Egyptian, which, although it is known to us only in its highest degree of refinement and not in its infancy, we must regard as the primary style of art, since we know of none anterior to it which could have exercised any influence over it. The Egyptian art was indeed not guided by pure artistic motives; it was not a free art paying its homage to beauty alone, and governed solely by regard to it; it was subservient to the religion of the country, and it was symbolism which decided on the choice of the object, and especially of the plants which were to serve for its decoration. But though symbolism was so far predominant, still the rendering of the natural types, the disposition of the plants remained open, and in this it was that the Egyptians displayed an artistic understanding entirely peculiar to themselves.

The elements of Egyptian ornament, originating in natural objects consist almost entirely of the lotus, papyrus and palm leaf. Symbolism determined this selection, for these represent emblematically the nourishment of body and mind: but in their artistic reproduction, though perfectly distinguishable and not widely different from their actual forms, they are no longer really the same as seen in nature. They are divested of all their accidents and brought into a thoroughly regular and symmetrical form, both when they appear in single ornamental types, as buds, flowers or plants, and when united in groups. In the latter case they appear in rows, in double rows alternately higher and lower in position, or in fanlike shape, repeating in a certain measure the forms of single flowers. Even when these flowers are represented as rising out of water, they stand out at regular intervals in the same degree of growth and in the same shape, and even the waves themselves have a uniform and regular course. So when we see a monarch offering these productions to his deity in acknowledgement and gratitude for an abundant harvest granted to his country, and when we might at all events have expected to meet with them in their most natural forms, even then the three flowers of the lotus and papyrus which the king holds in his hands show the entirely conventional and artistically accepted form. And in this the artist is guided by a right perception, that if these plants were to be represented under their natural appearance while the rest of the work was conventionalised, the result would be an entire absence of harmony between its parts.

But what could have induced the Egyptian artist to turn away in this manner from that which stood before his eyes? The creation of a national style which survived thousands of years and only died out with Egypt itself could not have sprung up from the mere innate feeling of beauty. Strict order and regularity proceeding from, or cultivated by priestly coercion were the essence of Egyptian life, and these they found in their observations of nature reigning through all her accidents. This observation of nature taught them to place the types of the plants before their eyes, but to discard the individual specimens. Thus, notwithstanding the apparent irregularities, they discovered the law and conformity of nature in the construction of the plants, the position of the leaves, and the form of the flowers; they discovered also in single leaves the law and regularity of the lines and veins which spread themselves out from the same centres in graceful curves. And thus they took for their model nature in her perfection, nature divested of all the imperfections and faults in which plants deviate from the true regularity of their forms, and this perfection became to them the law of Art. Representing legitimately the whole plant with the flower, showing it in profile and drawing the lines uniformly right and left, they can hardly be said to depart from nature, they simply idealised it, while they showed themselves its most faithful votaries.

No style of art has perhaps more correctly seized the connexion of ornament with nature and her vegetable types than the Egyptian, but its essential strictness restricted the freedom to which the artist might otherwise have attained, and its symbolism curtailed the choice of plants which nature offers in such numerous forms for artistic motives. Nevertheless where it does borrow from nature, it stands in close approximation to her forms, and seems perfectly acquainted with them.

Very different is the impression made by the ornamentation of early ascetic art, the Assyrian and Persian for example, as far as we are acquainted with it through its monumental remains. The Assyrian artist appears to have before his eyes not nature herself with her creations, but the conventional forms of another style of art, in all probability the Egyptian, and to have moved one step further off from nature and almost entirely to have forgotten her. Otherwise the manner of con-

ventionalising is the same, only bringing forward some new motives as symbolism disappears, but not increasing their number. More frequently also in Assyrian art, the flower is not drawn in profile but as seen from above, thus introducing the conventional form of the rosette. This occurs indeed in the Egyptian ornamentation, but there this decoration seems to originate rather from geometrical motives than from natural models.

Grecian art displayed a still greater licence with respect to nature, all idea of symbolism or religious influence disappearing in the choice and shape of her ornamental forms, and the only recognised law being regard to beauty, to the most exquisite elegance of decoration, without any positive emblematical significence. Still however, Grecian art, in its principal motives, does not go back upon external nature and her forms, but treats those types which have probably come from Asia, without any regard to those forms, according to her own peculiar taste, and so detaches herself the more from them. When we compare the acanthus, palm and honeysuckle of art with those of nature, we feel that there must be a great number of intermediate links between the two forms, and it is a question, whether in the formation of certain Grecian ornaments, the likeness to the honeysuckle, being at first merely accidental, was not discovered later. The Greeks indeed observed in their decoration more strictly the general laws of order which are to be found in plants, and which the Egyptians first discovered and applied to art.

These laws are observed also in that branch of ornamental art in which the Greeks seem to have made a nearer approach to nature, or at least to have borrowed many of her easily recognised motives. We allude to their decoration of earthen vessels, in which we at once distinguish the ivy, vine and laurel leaf which are everywhere fixed on the stems in a regular and symmetrical order, and never naturally designed with the accidents and blemishes which appear in nature, nor as twining, bending, or incircling one another. Only the regular contour of the leaf is shown, and it is usually filled out in one color, the veins being seldom marked, or if they are, consisting only of running lines symmetrically arranged.

Besides these vegetable forms which the Greeks were almost the first to borrow from nature, they added to the common stock of ornamental motives which the progress of art had provided, one other, which Roman art brought afterwards to the highest importance, namely, the tendril, a wavelike stem, moving hither and thither, branching off in tangents from leaves and flowers in order to fill up by its involutions the concavities right and left. Here also we see a motive borrowed from nature recognised as a law, and again as a law imitated and employed in art.

Whether the Greeks borrowed this from nature herself or received it from others and cultivated it by observation, it is certain that the Romans no longer looked to nature, but only to the conventional form which they inherited from the Greeks, and which they metamorphosed according to their own taste. Apparently they again approached nearer to nature, shaping the acanthus leaf somewhat more according to the type, but in reality they only aimed at giving to its involutions, with the expanded flower in the middle, the utmost possible grace, richness and effect, so that they were often obliged to disregard the law of nature altogether. It was so with the bold, energetic bendings, especially with the Corinthian and the essentially Roman composite capitals, to which the acanthus leaves placed one before the other were added in a merely mechanical way. Still regularity and symmetry predominated everywhere; the acanthus tendrils were formed into regular scrolls, making circles with the branches which displayed the open flowers in their centres, showing more or less complete spirals, while the leaves round the capitals had always the same form, position and intervals.

This Roman treatment of the acanthus found its most usual application in architecture, especially in Monumental Art, as being eminently plastic, which indeed seemed to enjoy a privileged and almost exclusive right to it; in private dwellings however the ornament attained a different and much richer style in painted decorations under Grecian precedent and influence, borrowing many new motives from nature, bringing forward an application of them which seems to us almost naturalistic, at all events, approaching the types more nearly than had till then been the case in any other style. We allude to the decorative paintings which were first discovered in the baths of Titus at Rome, and gave rise to Rafael's arabesques, and which are now universally known through the excavations at Pompeii. On the walls of the baths of Titus were seen wreaths of roses, swinging as festoons from pillar to pillar, or surrounding the frames of the panels. These wreaths are as naturally designed and colored as if the hand of the flower girl had bound them together just gathered fresh from the lap of nature. So also on the walls of Pompeii are seen numberless wreaths, in which leaves, flowers and fruits are fastened to a cord in all the free irregularity of nature. Plants are also often seen as if accidentally growing on the socles; a close investigation will however soon convince the observer that these approaches to nature do not imply an essential naturalism; that it is not the outward eye of the spectator which is the lawgiver, but the eye of the mind, the fancy; that the aim is not the imitation of natural flowers and plants, but only the ornament and decoration of the object. It is the genius of the artist which plays its part inflexibly with all these motives as pure means of art, and brings

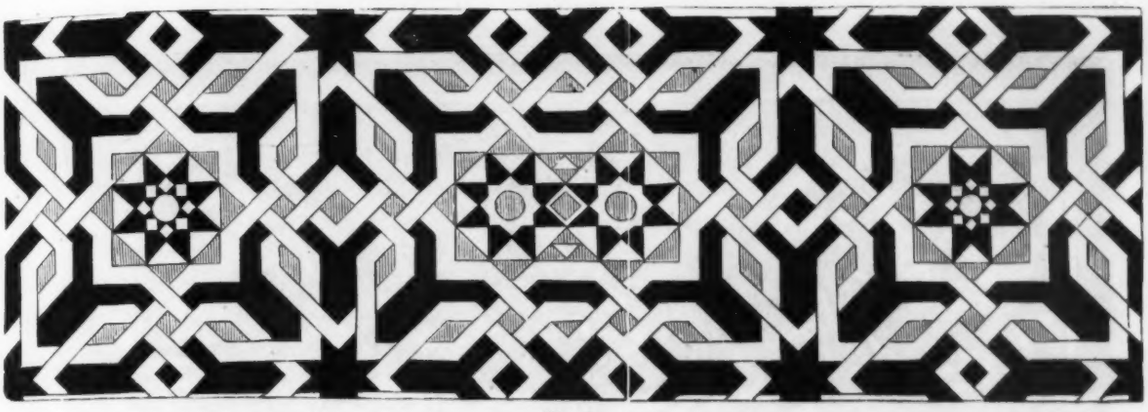
them at last under a certain law and order. Not only are these wreaths, cords and festoons brought into an ornamental system which by its fantasy is opposed to nature, but the creating and ordering hand of art is everywhere to be recognised. Every group of leaves, for example, is seen provided with golden fruits of similar patterns; on every foreground of plants are flowers symmetrically arranged; on the wreaths and festoons the leaves are found to the right and left in regular rows one behind the other; the composition of the uprising plants is fanciful; the stems freely united; one side the exact counterpart of the other; even when birds are introduced, the one on the left corresponds with the one on the right, the acanthus twines itself more freely and indeed quite independent of its natural movement, and all sorts of animals, lions, horses, stags and frogs sport through the scrolls and spirals. Everything shows that the fancy of the artist dominates the creations of nature.

There is another province of art in which we meet with the same kind of ornamentation. The bronze and silver vessels of the Greco-roman art in the times of the Empire are indeed chiefly adorned with the conventional ornaments of the Grecian style like the terra cotta vessels, but in relief, still surrounded by wreaths of laurel and other leaves which being shown in relief approach their natural types. The most pleasing example of this is in the larger candelabra of marble which are surrounded by branches of ivy and other plants, the foliage of which imitates in its plastic movements the life of nature, and to which twigs and tendrils are added in natural irregularity. Yet even this ornament, although represented without strict regular order is subservient to the structural form of the object, and so cleverly distributed that the idea of mere decoration is never left out of sight.

*(The continuation in our next.)*

## SPECIMENS OF ORNAMENTATION.

No. 1. Modern. Ornament filling a Triangular Panel.



No. 2.

No. 3.

No. 4.

No. 5.

No. 6.

No. 2. From Cairo. Mosaic Pattern in black, red and yellow.
Nos. 3 and 4. Brackets. Messrs. Minton & Co., Stoke upon Trent.
Nos. 5 and 6. From Venice. Fifteenth century. Ornaments from Screen in Miracoli Church.
1/4 full size.

No. 7.

No. 8.

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No. 7. Italian Renaissance. Wood-Carving from the Loggie of the Vatican. From a sketch by M. L. Boitte, Archt., Paris.

No. 8. Panel Ornament. From Schinkel's designs in Grecian Style in the Beuth-Schinkel Museum, Berlin.

(See Part 12.)

No. 9.

No. 10.

No. 9. Design of a Capital by M. W. Bogler, Archt., Wiesbaden.

No. 10. Carved Wood Capital of a Window Post, designed by M. W. Bogler, Archt., Wiesbaden.

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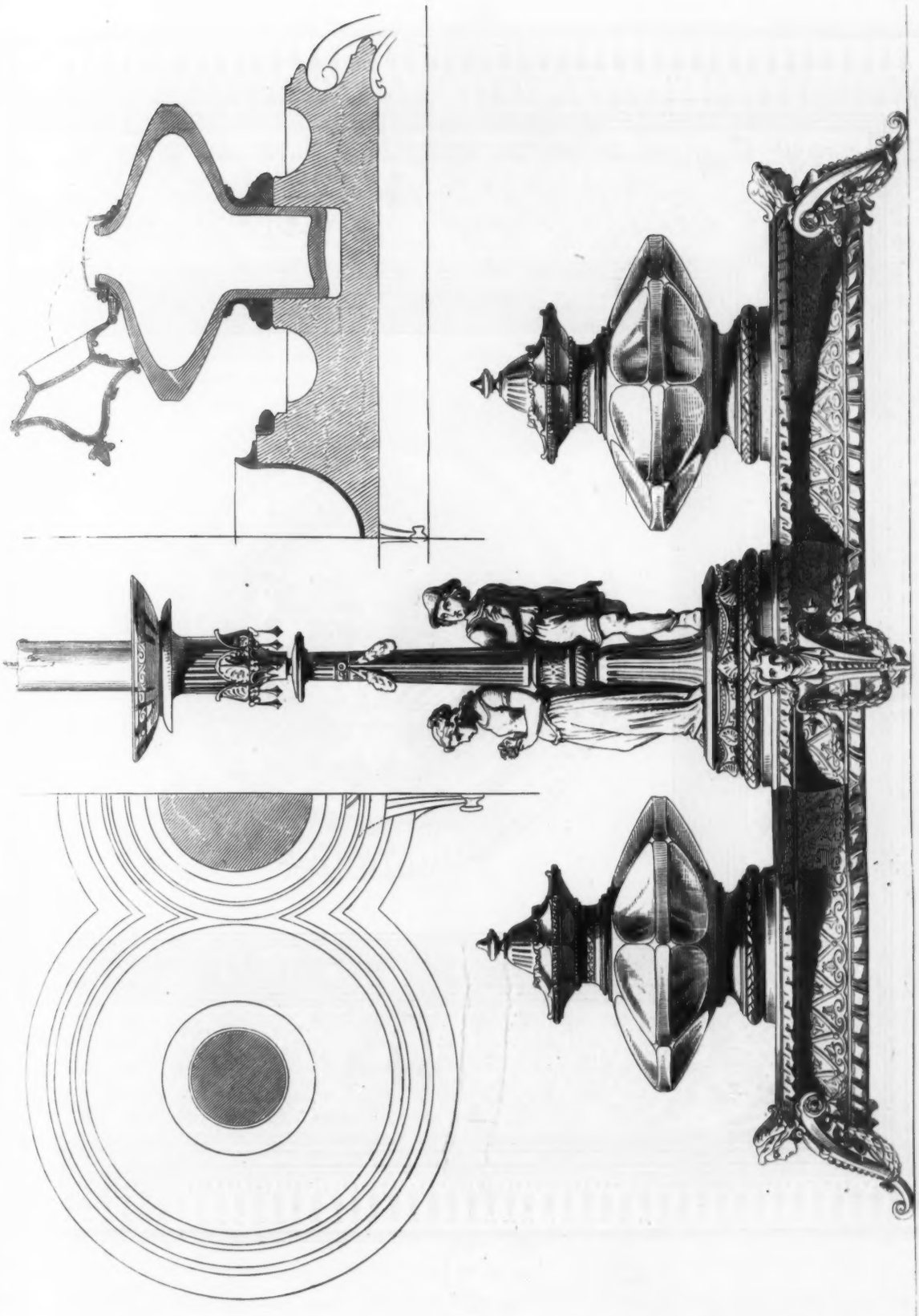
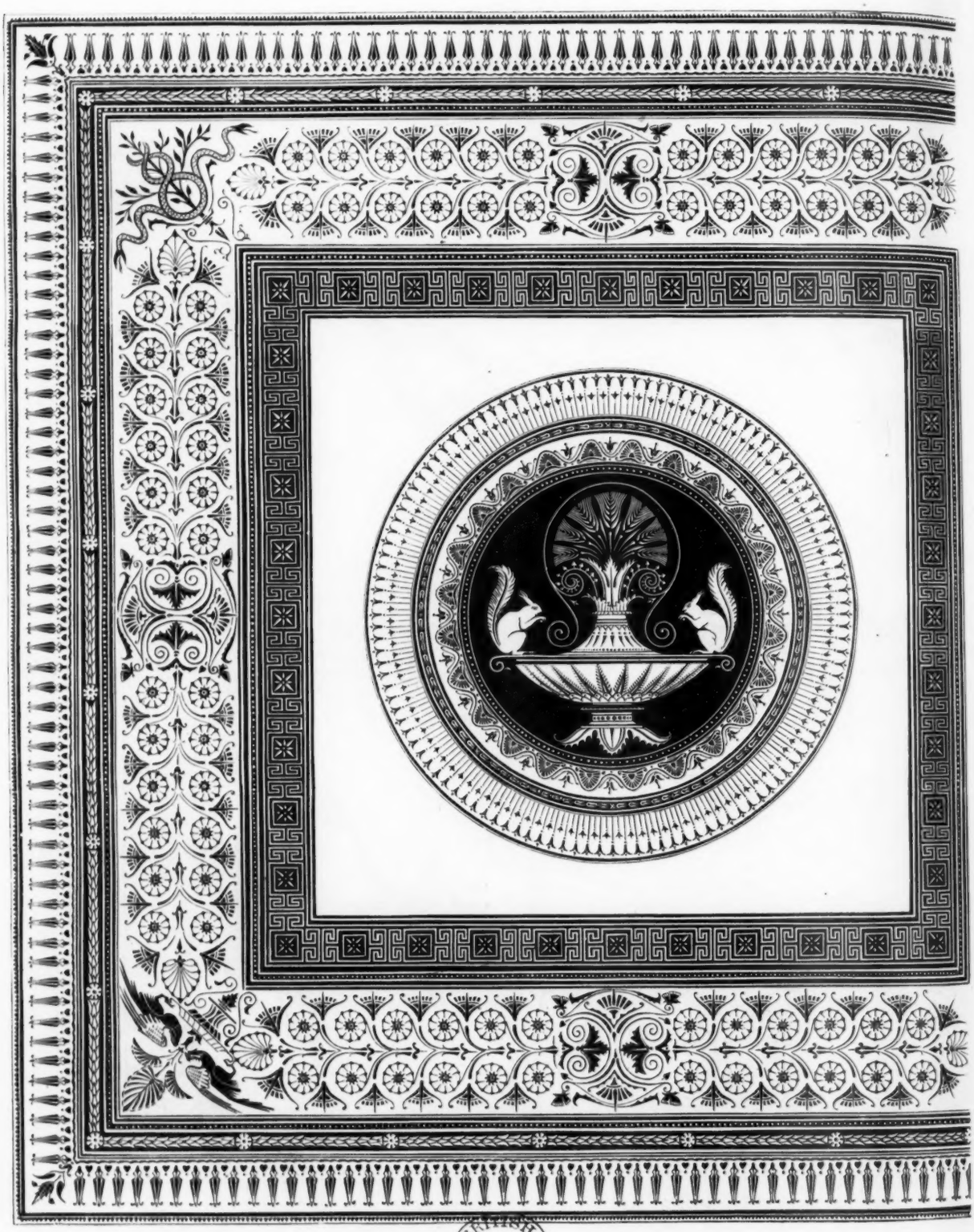
No. 11. Candelabrum. Messrs. Minton & Co. Stoke upon Trent.



Nos. 12—14. Design of Inkstand for a Lady's Writing Table by Prof. W. Wolanek, Vienna.
Elevation, plan and section $^1/_3$ real size.



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No. 15. Napkin Pattern, 1/4 real size.
Manufactured from designs of Mr. E. Jacobsthal by Mr. Scheffner, Gr. Schœnau.

Nos. 16—20. Bridal Jewellery, filagree with white, black and blue enamel and set with corals, pearls and rubies.
Mr. A. Seder, Munich.

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Nos. 21—23. Design of a Sword of State by Mr. A. Tœpfer, Augsburg.
Blade and upper part of sheath show etching and engraving, all the other ornamented parts being chased. Laurel wreath of guard, and sheath mountings in pierced work, the latter relieved by black velvet ground. Sword hilt enriched by medallions with enamelled initials and arms, and set with precious stones or pearls.

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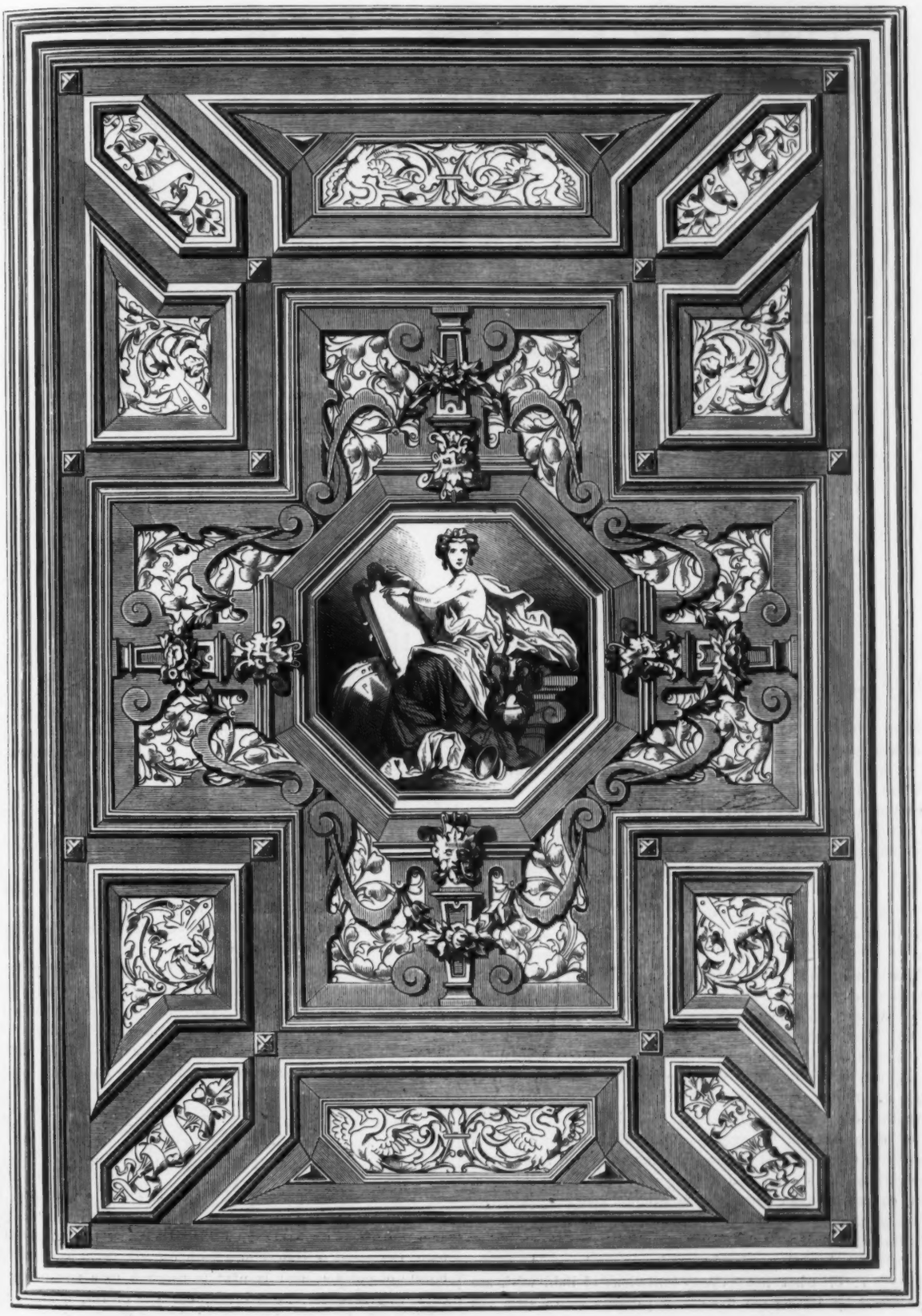
Nos. 24—29. Set of Furniture designed and manufactured for the Grand Hôtel, Vienna, by Mr. F. Schœnthaler.

No. 30. Cabinet, designed and manufactured by the Berlin Renaissance Company for the promotion of Wood Carving.
Messrs. L. & S. Lœvinson and R. Kemnitz.
Details see Supplement.



No. 31. Panelled Wooden Ceiling for a Dining Room. Mr. Arnold Müller, Munich.
Oak frame pieces with stained pear mouldings, ground of great central panel gold, of smaller compartments blue, painted ornament.

No. 32. Cast Balcony Railings, designed in the Style of Louis XVI. and manufactured by M. P. Chapal, Paris.

# VARIOUS.

## Buhl Work and Reisner Work.

Buhl was a cabinet-maker in the days of Louis XIV. and was instrumental in bringing into use a kind of decorative furniture, or furniture decoration, which has been more or less in favor ever since. It was not usually, in his work, actual wood that formed the surface; more frequently it was brass, silver, or some other metal, inlaid in tortoise-shell, on a wood backing. The mode of procedure was curious. A layer, say, of brass, and a layer of tortoise-shell, each as thin as veneer, were glued on opposite surfaces of a piece of paper; another piece of paper was glued outside, a pattern or device was drawn on the outside paper, and all the lines of the device were cut through and through with a fine saw.

A little moistening removed the papers, and separated the inlay. What followed? Two patterns could be produced out of the two veneers: a brass inlay in tortoise-shell, and a tortoise-shell inlay in brass. The inlays, thus fabricated, were applied as veneers to the surface of a cabinet or other article of furniture. Old cabinets, thus adorned by Buhl and his contemporaries, or now eagerly brought up at high prices by art collectors.

Another cabinet-maker of the same period, Reisner, varied the form of his productions by employing two kinds of wood instead of brass and tortoise-shell: usually selecting tulip wood and some darker variety. This was called Reisner work; like real Buhl work, it now commands high prices. It is evident that, the principle once being clearly understood, its application may be almost infinitely varied, according to the choice of materials, whether tortoise-shell, ivory, mother of pearl, ebony, fancy woods, gold, silver, brass, copper, or what not. Cheap imitations of Buhl work are now produced by cutting out the veneer patterns with a stamping press, instead of by the slower aid of a saw. Other cheap imitations are made in the papier-maché workshops of Birmingham; fanciful patterns in brass, stamped out, are fastened down upon papier-maché, and the interstices of the device gradually filled up with successive coatings of black japan varnish. As to the devices that may be cut out with a fine saw, the fretwork of a pianoforte furnishes a very good example; although it is not often that the workman attempts anything of a pictorial character therein.

*(Scientific American.)*

## How to bleach Yellow Ivory.

We published a process for bleaching ivory which had turned yellow. That method did not appear to us very promising any more than the following which we give for what they are worth. The first directs the article to be placed for an hour in a saturated solution of alum, after which it is to be rubbed first with a woolen and then with a linen cloth until it is perfectly dry.

The second process, which the writer we quote from says he prefers, consists simply in digesting the ivory article in thin milk of lime kept hot until such article has assumed the desired whiteness. Then it is to be taken out, dried, and polished. How long it may possibly be necessary to continue the immersion the author does not inform us.

## Cold Galvanisation of Iron.

The metal is first cleaned by being placed in a bath, made up of water, 1,000 litres; hydrochloric acid, 550 litres; sulphuric acid, 50 litres; glycerine, 20 litres. On being removed from that bath, the metal is placed in a bath containing 10 per cent of carbonate of potassa, and is next transferred to a metallising bath, consisting of water, 1,000 litres; chloride of tin, 5 kilogr.; acid sulphate of alumina, 4 kilogr.; chloride of alumina, 10 kilogr. The metal is left in this mixture for from three to twelve hours, according to the thickness of the layer of zinc to be desired.

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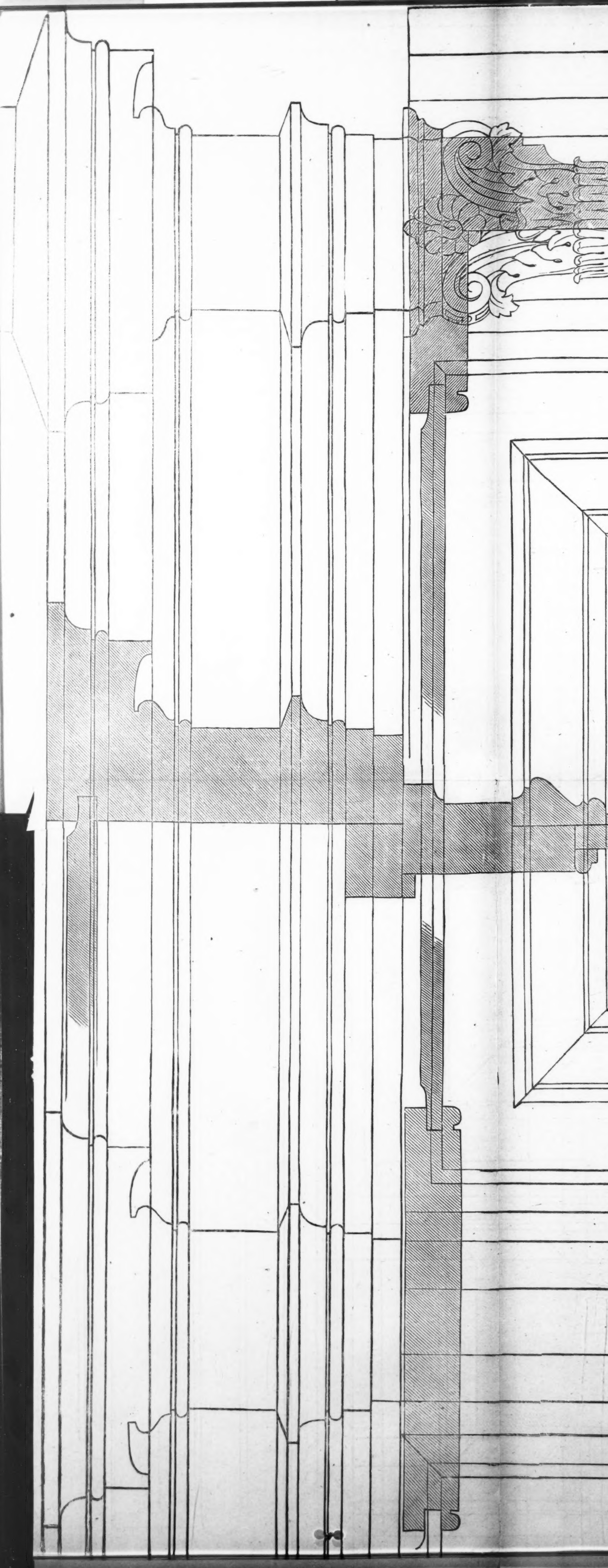
FIG. 1 PART 1



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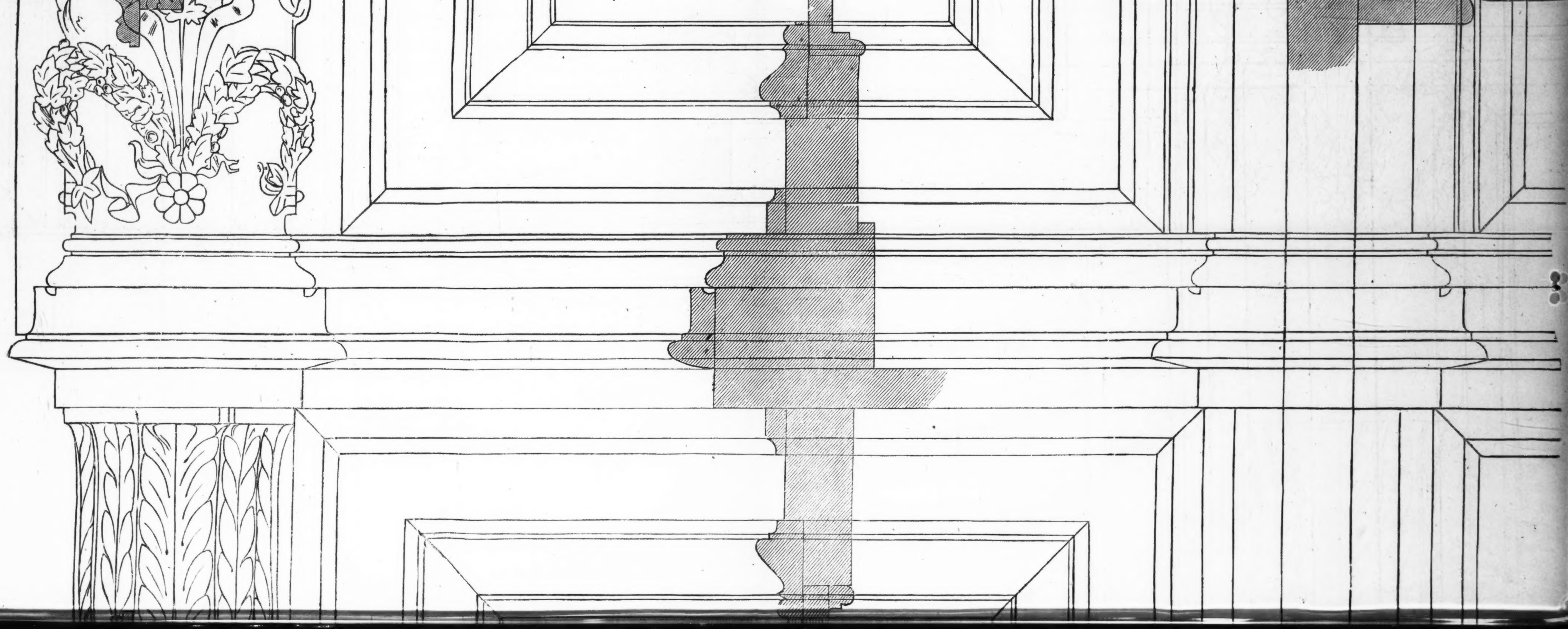


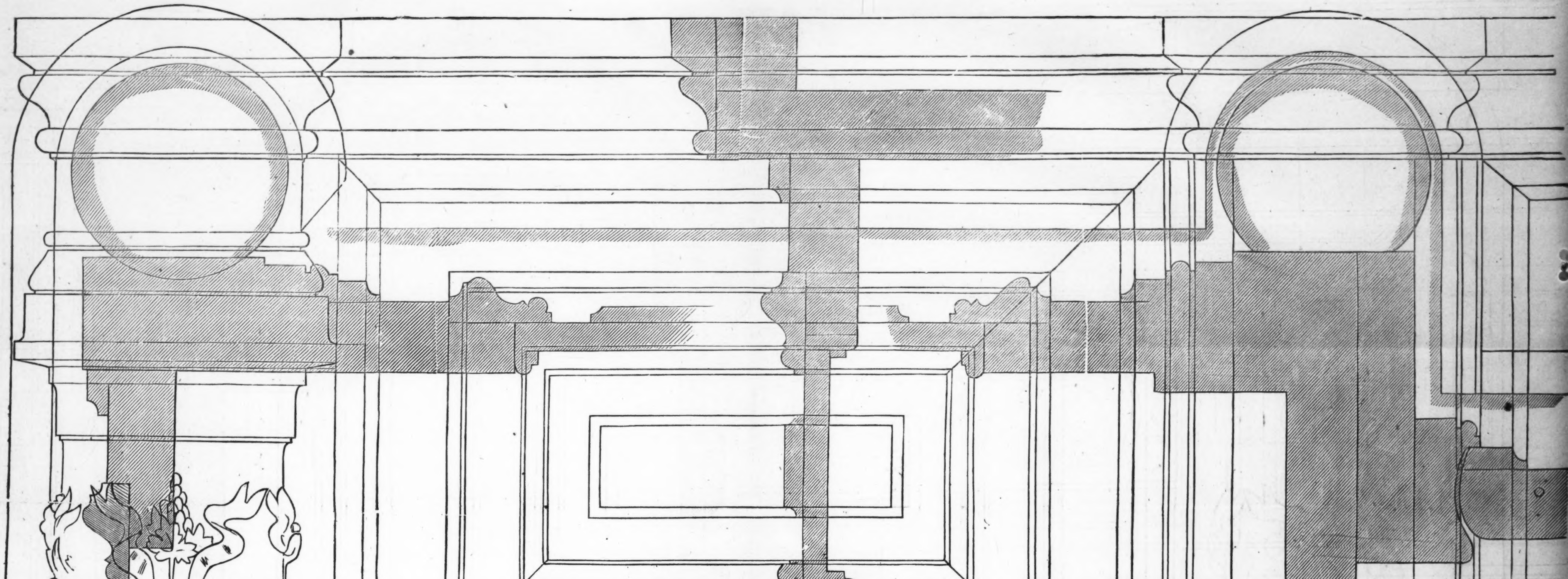
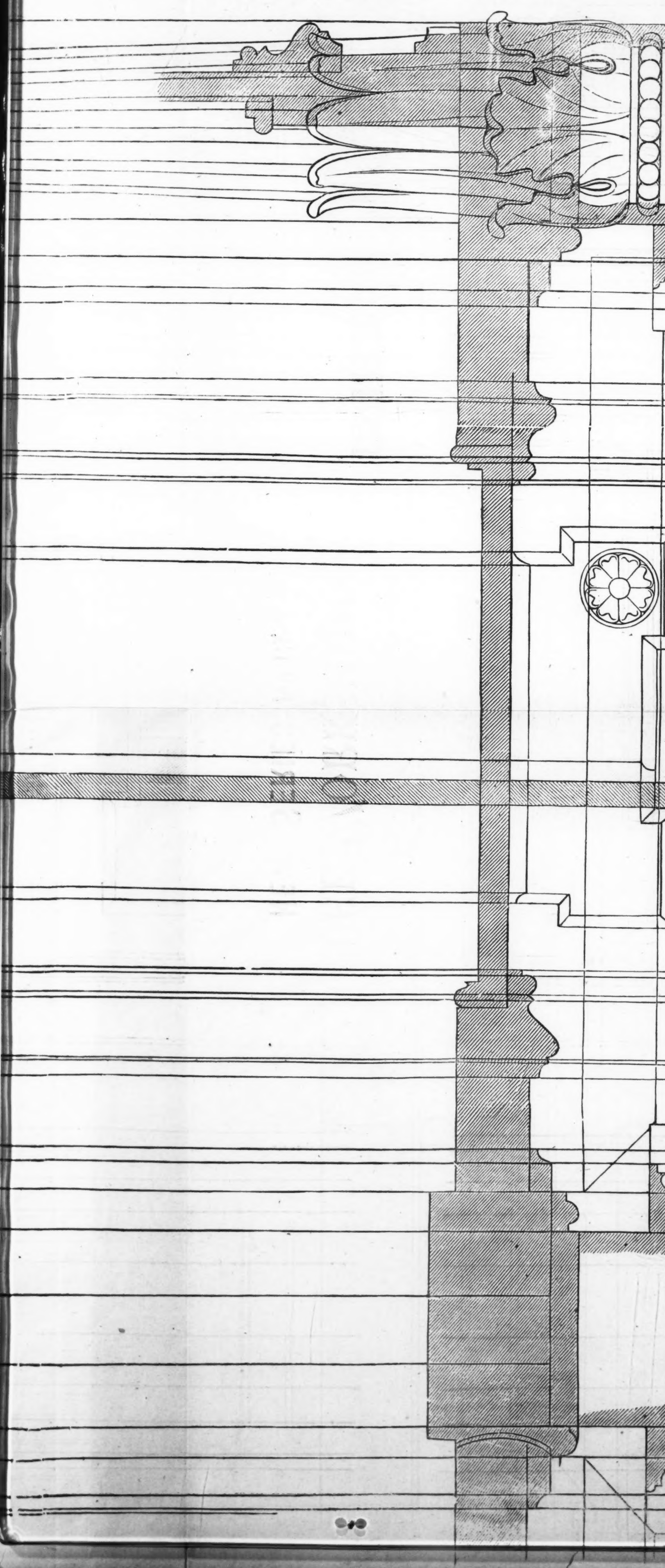


FIG. 2 PART 1



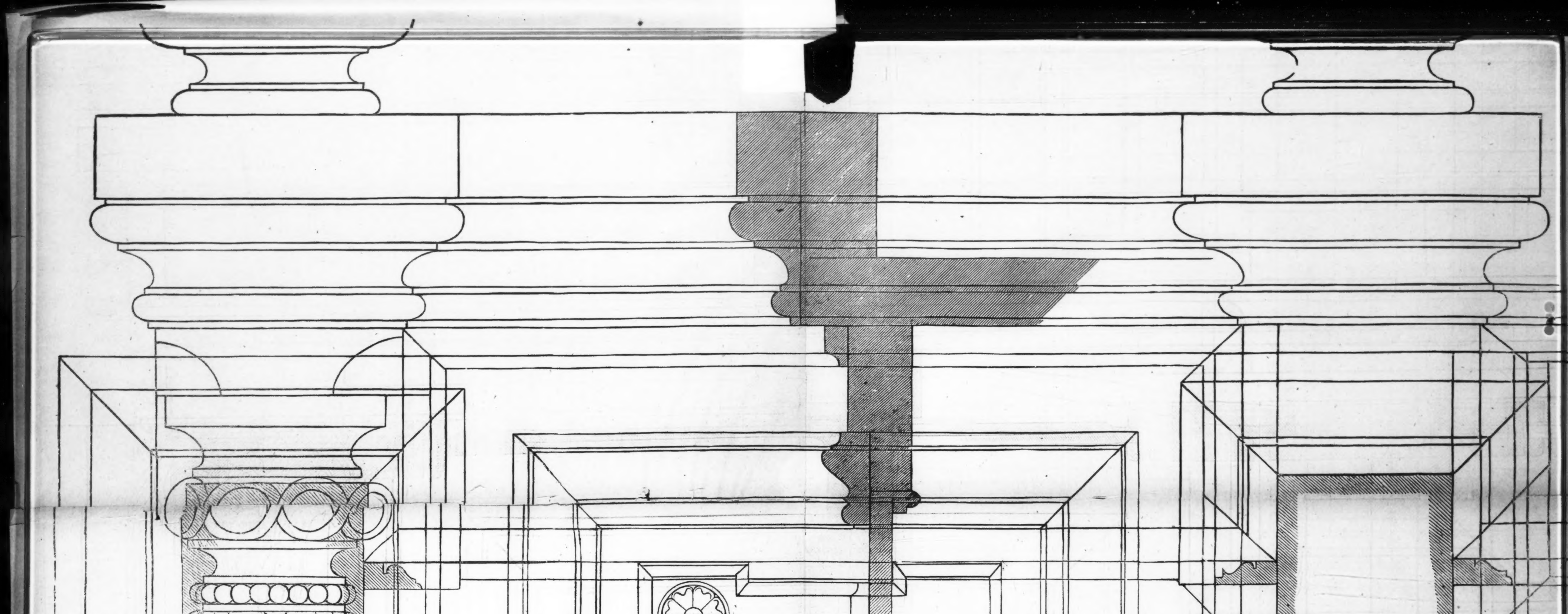
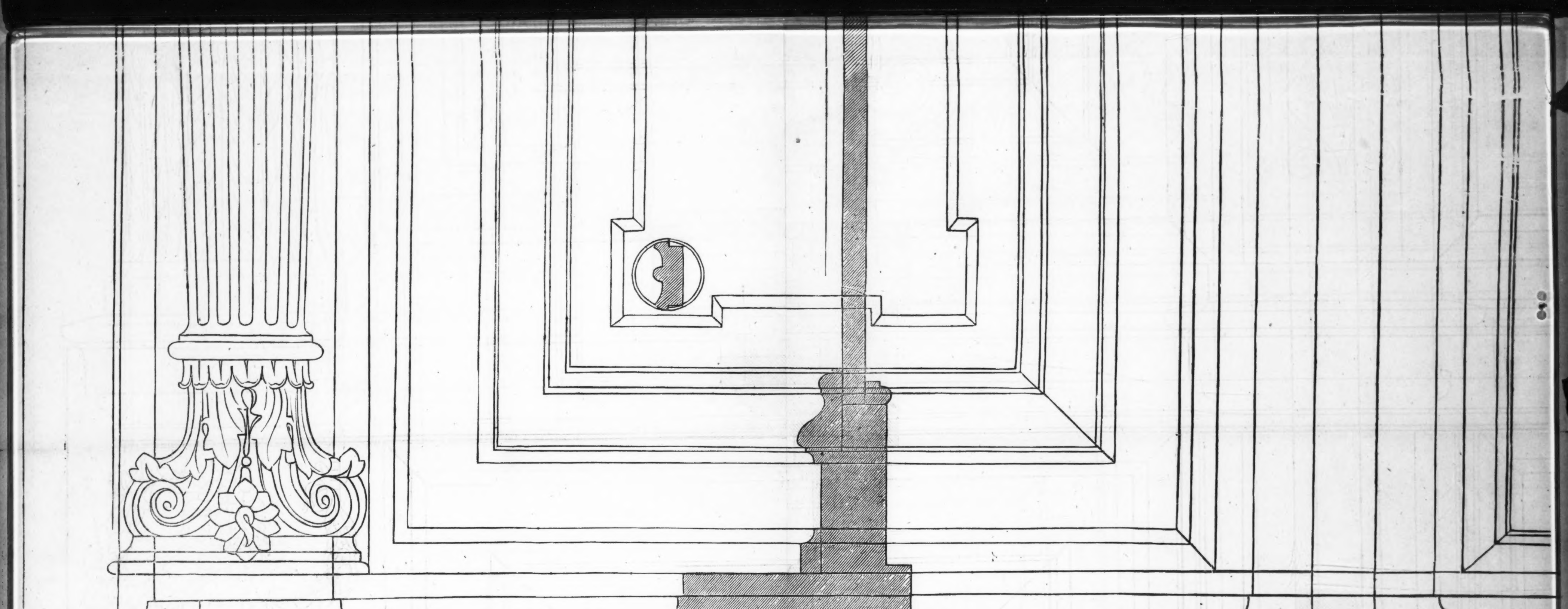



FIG 2 PART 2